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in Proc. of Can. Inst.

Public Libraries in Canada. By James Bain, Jr., Esq.

(Read December 11, 1897.)

There was a time, shortly after the discovery of printing, when it was possible for a man like Casaubon to say that he knew the contents, more or less thoroughly, of every printed book. But the limits of human endurance were speedily passed, and to-day the enormous mass of literature taxes the ingenuity of the librarian to mould it into organized form. Each successive generation adds its own stratum, and the whole forms the storehouse from which the new generation draws its inspiration and facts. This is especially true of the scientific worker, dependent on the accumulation of minute facts, recorded by long series of patient observers. It is for this reason, therefore, that I bring before you an institution devoted to science, a paper on the "Libraries of the Dominion."

The art of printing was introduced into the infant colonies at a very early period. In Halifax the *Gazette* was published in 1756, the first-born of a numerous progeny, and was followed by the Quebec *Gazette* in 1764. In 1779 a number of the officers stationed at Quebec and of the leading merchants undertook the formation of a subscription library. The Governor, General Haldimand, took an active part in the work, and ordered, on behalf of the subscribers, £500 worth of books from London. The selection was entrusted to Richard Cumberland, dramatist, and an interesting letter from the Governor, addressed to him, describing the literary wants of the town and the class of books to be sent, is now in the public archives, Ottawa. The books arrived in due course, and, while no catalogue survives, I think it would not be difficult to name a large proportion of them. The book world in which Dr. Johnson moved was yet a small one. A room for their reception was granted in the bishop's palace, and as late as 1806 we learn from "Lambert's Travels" that it was the only library in Canada. Removed several times, it slowly increased, until in 1822 it numbered 4,000 volumes. The list of subscribers having become very much reduced, it was leased to the Quebec Literary Association in 1843. In 1854 a portion of it was burned with the Parliament Building, where it was then quartered; and finally, in 1866, the entire library, consisting of 6,999 volumes, was sold, subject to conditions, to the Literary and Historical Society for the nominal sum of $500.

Naturally, on the organization of each of the provinces, libraries were established in connection with the Legislatures. In Upper Canada the small library in the Parliament Building was destroyed by the Americans, and the one by which it was replaced by the fire of 1824, so that, when the two libraries of Upper and Lower Canada were united in 1841, there appears to have been little left of the early fugitive literature of the province. At the end of the past year the legislative libraries of the Dominion numbered nine, and contained 48,834 pamphlets and 309,395 volumes. By far the most important of these is the library of the House at Ottawa. Originally established on the union of the provinces of Upper and Lower Canada in 1841, it was successively removed with the seat of government from Kingston to Montreal, to Quebec, to Toronto, again to Quebec, and finally to Ottawa—a wandering life, which effectually prevented its attaining large proportions.

The unfortunate fires in Montreal and Quebec still further injured it, robbing it of much that was very valuable, and which could not be replaced. On the federation of the different provinces, in 1867, the library of the two provinces only passed into the hands of the Federal Government. The beautiful building in which it is placed behind the House of Parliament presents a prominent feature in the magnificent pile of buildings which crown the heights overlooking the Ottawa River, and from the windows the spectator gazes across the rocky gorge and the

Chaudiere Falls toward the Laurentide hills, forming one of the most picturesque scenes on the continent. In the eyes of the librarian the library has only one serious defect—it is complete—no arrangement has been made for extension.

On the confederation, in 1867, of the provinces which now form the Dominion, the union which existed between the provinces of Upper and Lower Canada was dissolved, and, as we have seen, the library passed into the hands of the Federal Government. Each of these provinces, now known as Ontario and Quebec, established new libraries in Toronto and Quebec city.

The sixty-two colleges and universities of the Dominion are provided with libraries containing 627,626 volumes and 24,894 pamphlets, an average of 10,123 volumes and 402 pamphlets. It is scarcely fair, however, to depend on an average of the whole number, as some half dozen universities possess at least half of the total number.

The senior of these, Laval University, Quebec, is famous as being, after Harvard, the oldest on the continent, being founded by Bishop Laval in 1663. During the dark days which witnessed the long struggle, first with the Iroquois and afterwards with the English and Americans, little progress was made in the collection of books, and it was not until it was converted into a university, in 1852, that its library commenced to increase rapidly. On the suppression of the Jesuit Order and seminary these books were transferred to it. It numbers considerably over 100,000 volumes, and is unrivalled for the extent and character of its French collection and its many scarce books in early French-Canadian literature and history. Their collection of the relations of the early Jesuit missionaries is only surpassed by the Lenox library, New York.

Our own Province of Ontario was for long the only one which attempted to grapple with the question of public libraries.

Miss Carnochan, of Niagara, has given an interesting account in the Transactions of this Institute for 1895, of the formation and history of the first circulating library in Upper Canada (1800-1820), established by some enterprising citizens of the Town of Niagara, for the supply of their own immediate wants and of those who could pay the small annual fee. It was successful until the destruction of the town by the American troops in 1813 wasted its volumes and impoverished its subscribers, so that it shortly after quietly passed out of existence.

In 1848 the late Dr. Ryerson drafted a School Bill which contained provisions for school and township libraries, and succeeded in awakening a deep interest in the subject. Ever anxious to impress on his hearers the importance of libraries as the keystone to a free educational system, he urged it on every opportunity. Lord Elgin, at that time Governor-General, was so strongly impressed with the importance of the movement that he styled it the "Crown and glory of the institutions of the province." In 1854 Parliament passed the requisite Act, and granted him the necessary funds to carry out his views in the matter. The regulations of the Department authorized each county council to establish four classes of libraries :

An ordinary common school library in each schoolhouse for the use of the children and ratepayers.

A general public lending library, available to all the ratepayers in the municipality.

A professional library of books on teaching, school organization, language and kindred subjects, available for teachers only.

A library in any public institution under the control of the municipality for the use of the inmates, or in any county gaol, for the use of the prisoners.

To aid this work a book depository was established in the Education Office to enable the smaller libraries to obtain readily good literature. The books were supplied at cost, and a grant of 100 per cent. on the amount remitted was added in books by the Department. During the thirty years of its existence 1,407,140 volumes were so supplied.

The proposal to establish the second class was, however, premature, and accordingly, finding that Mechanics' Institutes, supported by members' fees, were being developed throughout the many towns and villages, the Educational Department wisely aided the movement by giving a small grant, proportionate to the amount contributed by the members, for the purchase of books, and reaching a maximum of $200, afterwards increased under altered conditions to $400 annually. In 1869 these had grown to number 26, in 1880, 74, and in 1896 to 292. The number of books possessed by these 292 libraries was 404,605, or an average of 1,385 each, with a total membership of 32,603. The issue of books for home reading was 700,958, or an average of 24.6 for each member, which is a very creditable return, considering that only thirty per cent. of the books were fiction.

In 1895 the Minister of Education brought in a bill, which came into force in May, changing the name, "Mechanics' Institutes" into "Public Library." By this Act the directors of any Mechanics' Institute were empowered to transfer the property of the Institute to the municipal corporation on condition that the library be free. This can be done without passing a by-law or requiring a vote from the people. A large number have already availed themselves of it.

In the cities and larger towns, however, the Mechanics' Institute, with its limited number of subscribers, was found unequal to the task assigned it, and accordingly, in 1882, the Free Libraries Act was passed, based upon similar enactments in Britain and the United States.

The first Free Library established under the Act was in 1883, and in the period between that date and 1896 fifty-four have successfully come into operation. They contain 254,091 volumes and circulated during 1895, 1,216,407. Two of them, Toronto, and Hamilton, take rank, both in number and character of their books, among the best libraries of the Dominion.

Unitedly the 346 Public and Free Libraries of the Province of Ontario have on their shelves 658,696 volumes, and supplied in 1895, 1,917,365 books to their readers. Their revenue was $183,688, of which $42,741 was contributed by the Province, and they spent of this in books $49,417.

The Province of Quebec has not yet introduced a Free Library Act, but the generosity of the late Mr. Fraser and of a number of gentlemen in Montreal has provided a fund for the establishment of a Free Library in that city, which was opened in October, 1885, under the title of the Fraser Institute. The Mercantile Library Association transferred to it 5,500 English books and L'Institut Canadien 7,000 French.

In St. John, N.B., a Free Library was founded in June, 1883, to commemorate the landing of the Loyalists a century previous, and in Halifax a Free Library owes its origin to the generosity of the late Chief Justice Young, both of which have been very successful. A sister society, the Library and Historical Society of Manitoba, has been the means of introducing a Public Library, and, with the assistance of the municipal authorities of Winnipeg, has laid the foundation of an extensive and valuable library.

In the lack of trustworthy information, I have not attempted to give any particulars of the Law, Medical, Scientific, Collegiate Institute and Young Men's Christian Association Libraries, further than they are summed up in the following condensed tables, showing the character, and the Province in which they are placed, of the 480 libraries of a more or less public character in Canada.

KIND.	NO.	PAMPHLETS.	BOOKS.
Law	21	1,929	105,788
Legislation	9	48,834	309,395
Public	325	17,535	663,125
Collegiate, etc	62	24,894	627,246
Others	29	15,224	96,918
Special	2	14,330	18,500
Y. M. C. Associations	32	....	23,660
Totals	480	122,746	1,874,632

By provinces the 480 libraries are distributed:

Province.	No.	Pamphlets.	Books.
Ontario	374	32,922	942,187
Quebec	39	31,841	531,356
Nova Scotia	26	17,756	97,521
New Brunswick	15	2,689	54,787
Prince Edward Island	3	500	8,528
Manitoba	8	5,014	34,730
British Columbia	10	1,554	11,303
North-West Territories	1	140	2,150
	476	93,416	1,682,572
Dominion	4	29,330	192,060
Totals	480	122,746	1,874,632

We may conclude, therefore, from these figures, that so far as the ordinary reader and University student are concerned, Ontario, at least in the cities and towns, is not badly served. The percentage of books per head is not unworthy of a Province which has only been redeemed from the wilderness during the past fifty years. In two directions, however, do we find shortcomings, if not actual want. Outside of the larger cities, towns and villages lies a large proportion of the population of this Province as well as in the others, which are entirely without access to books. There are whole townships and numbers of villages where the weekly newspaper is the only connecting link with modern science and literature.

If we wish to create an attachment by the farmer for his farm, to give an interest in life to his children in their surroundings instead of in the city, and, in other words, to lay the basis for a successful and pleasant country life, we must try to make his intellectual surroundings more attractive and profitable.

And this is not a new problem. Men who have had their country's good at heart have tried for years to meet the difficulty. The late Dr. Ryerson, as we have seen, attempted to make every school-house in the country a centre of "light and sweetness" by the school library, but failed because the effort was premature and because no effort was made to add to or exchange the books.

Since 1892 an effort has been made in New York State to meet it in a different manner. The State law of that year authorized the Regents of the State Library to lend for a limited time selections of books from the duplicate department of the State Library, or from books specially given or bought for this purpose, to Public Libraries under State supervision or to communities meeting required conditions. Out of $25,000 appropriated for Free Libraries, a portion was at once set apart to buy and prepare books to be loaned under these rules.

The rules then adopted provide that a selection of one hundred books may be lent for six months to the trustees of any Public Library in the State on payment of a fee of five dollars to cover the expense of cases, catalogues, stationery and transportation both ways. Where no such library exists, the books will be lent on petition of any twenty-five resident taxpayers. Special collections of books may also be lent to the officers of a University extension centre, reading course or study club, if properly registered. A later rule offers selections of fifty volumes for a fee of three dollars. In 1893 the Librarian at Albany began to send out a number of small libraries, of 100 volumes each, to such of the small towns and villages as were not provided with Free Libraries. One of these small libraries remained in the community but six months, and was then exchanged for another—hence the name "travelling libraries," which has been applied to them.

The leading purpose seems to have been to incite communities to found permanent local libraries, but the scope of the work has been widened, and the system now provides smaller collections of books for rural communities. So successful has it proved that in 1895 the State of Michigan appropriated $2,500 to buy books for a similar system and in 1896 the State of Iowa set aside $5,000 for a like purpose.

In the same year Mr. Hutchins reports to the State Library Commission that in two counties of Wisconsin similar work had been commenced by private individuals. He says that each small library was put up in a substantial case, with double doors,

a lock and key, and so carefully packed that it could be safely shipped by freight. It was provided with a complete but simple system of blank records, so that it could be placed upon a table or counter, unlocked, and be ready for as effective and methodical work as any larger circulating library. In order to insure good care for the volumes and a continuous local interest, the libraries were only sent to communities which organized a local library association of twenty members who agreed to care for the books and to place them where they would circulate freely under the simple library rules prescribed. Each local association elected a secretary, who acted as its executive officer, and each paid a fee of one dollar for each library as a partial payment of the transportation charges.

Twenty-six libraries in one county were sent out in this way. They were visited about two months after by Mr. Hutchins, and he found them even more popular than had been expected. The most interesting accounts are given of the avidity with which the young especially seized the books. The movement is yet too young to allow of accurate statistics, yet they have proved that in Wisconsin, as in New York and Michigan, they supply an urgent need that has not been supplied by any other agency.

They have carried into hundreds of homes new thoughts and information, higher aspirations and ideals, new forces that are making for a better individual, family and social life. Their books are warmly welcomed by families whose doors are closed to the reformer or the missionary. Hundreds of small communities in Wisconsin have attempted to do such work for themselves, but have nearly always failed. They have raised money by entertainments or private subscriptions, and have started libraries with high hopes. In most cases their selection of books has been unfortunate, and when the few entertaining books have been read by most of the patrons and no new volumes are added the popular interest dies, and the library is either put in an obscure place or its volumes are scattered.

By the new system only wholesome and entertaining books are bought, and they are constantly appealing to new readers until worn out by use, and not merely shelf worn. Every six months a library is new to some public, and its arrival is a matter of comment and draws new interest to the library station. The books are bought at the lowest, and substantial editions are selected. They can be occasionally examined and repaired, an important economy, for with books as with clothing, a "stitch in time saves nine." In the making of rules and regulations a wide body of experience can be drawn upon, and in the printing much economy exercised.

Finally, it practically takes the selection of the reading of great numbers of untrained readers from the hands of blind chance, and puts it in the custody of trained experts, who can draw for assistance upon the library experience of the world. Our great and costly system of public schools works unceasingly to teach children how to read and then leaves too many of them to go through their adult lives without using that power to the best advantage, because of lack of opportunity.

The travelling libraries offer an unexpectedly cheap, efficient and practicable method of broadening our educational system to include in its beneficent purposes every one who goes out from the brief course of our common schools, and to enable them to pursue a life-long system of education.

Such a system as has been described seems feasible in Ontario. No part of the Province is beyond reach by rail or steamer, and in no part need there be lack of readers. Our school system, by providing school sections of moderate area, each with its school-house and teacher, seems to have placed the machinery ready to hand. In Wisconsin about one-third of the libraries are kept in the postoffice, one-half in farm houses and the remainder in small stores. But with the school master as librarian and the school-house as the distributing post, the most widely-scattered farm population could be easily reached, while the results of the daily tasks would be more satisfactory. By supplying also in this way the smaller existing Public Libraries, which are barely able to add to their collections, boxes of 100 new books

every six months, fresh life would be thrown into them and their readers brought into contact with the literature of the day.

The Minister of Education might justly consider the proposal to curtail the grants for libraries, amounting to over $42,700, and devote the saving to the establishment of travelling libraries.

The second want is found at the other end of the scale. Our best libraries have not reached the stage of meeting the wants of our best scholars, and with the limited means at their disposal the time seems far distant when they will be able to do so. Rivalry is out of question with such great libraries as those of Harvard, the Astor-Lenox, Smithsonian, and others in the United States, not to speak of Great Britain, France and Germany, or even Russia; but if our students are to remain at home, some provision must be made to meet their wants. As a nation we cannot afford to be entirely dependent upon others for our highest culture, so that it is incumbent on us to consider carefully our position, and if possible, by combination and economy of energy, endeavour to supply our want.

We have in the City of Toronto some fifteen, more or less, public libraries, all of which, except four, are devoted to special subjects. These four are: the Legislative Library, the University of Toronto, the Public Reference Library, and the Canadian Institute. The first three mentioned are somewhat on the same lines, special departments being added to each to meet special requirements. In the past efforts have been made by the librarians to prevent the duplication of expensive books and sets; but necessarily a large proportion of the books are alike, and much waste of money, time and energy has ensued. The Legislative Library, established to supply the demands of our legislators, has been forced to add to its shelves quantities of general literature. It has now outgrown the chamber provided for it, and it will be necessary for the Government at an early date to provide further accommodation. The City Public Reference Library has in like manner grown to about 45,000 volumes, which are housed in a building unsuitable for the purpose—exposed to danger from fire and in need of additional space for expansion. The Canadian Institute, with its valuable collection of Transactions, is in much the same condition, with the additional disadvantage that the student finds here only a portion of his work, though an important one, and a lack of proper catalogues and literary assistance.

We have here three libraries which partially overlap and which fail to make full use of their opportunities by reason of special circumstances, and yet which if worked in harmony would do much to remove the present reproach.

It has seemed to me, after careful consideration, that the best interests of the Province and city would be served by adopting a proposal such as the following:

The Province of Ontario and the City of Toronto to unite in the maintenance of a common Provincial Reference Library, the books in which would be free to every person in the Province.

The Province, in consideration of the value of the books in the Public Library, to erect suitable buildings in a suitable locality.

The Legislative Library to be confined to such books as are actually required for legislative purposes, and the balance of the books transferred to the joint library.

The Canadian Institute to hand over their collection to the joint library, receiving in consideration a suitable meeting room.

Regulations made by which students in all parts of the Province could share in the use of the books, due regard being had for their safety.

In this way a library could be instituted—free to the citizens of Toronto, as their own is to-day—furnishing the highest literature to every student in the Province, properly housed with little more expense than the three libraries are at present costing, in which would be found room for extensive geological, mineralogical, botanical and other departments, so much wanted, forming a National Library worthy of the Province and of the City in which it is placed.

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